

AUSTRALIAN APARTHEID IN PRACTICE

***One Law for The Whites, Another Law for The Blacks:* Police Ignore Racist Bashings on The NSW Far South Coast**

Muriel and Gary Campbell's family links to their home town of Bermagui on the NSW Far South Coast and its surrounding areas go a long way back. Gary's great grandparents Ninum Campbell and Ada May Coombes even lived in this area in pre-white settlement times (*The Triangle*, February 2009.) Though they are respected elders within their community, little respect was shown to them by the local police force after they were horrifically bashed by two young white men while walking home from the Bermagui Country Club in the early hours of New Years morning. "Mrs Campbell and her nephew Kenneth Bell were punched in the face; her husband, Gary Campbell, a teacher's aide at the primary school, was knocked to the ground and kicked; and their son Ian was knocked out by an elbow to the jaw." She said that her family was now living in fear and had "given up on police." (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 4 2009)

Five weeks after the assault, police hadn't yet interviewed either of the attackers despite the presence of many witnesses to the bashing. Muriel Campbell alleges that one of the two identified himself as a member of the defence force as he shouted, "We fixed you black c___s tonight. I'm not afraid of the police. I have guns and I can shoot you black c___s any time I want to." (*SMH*, March 4 2009)

Indeed, it was only after public accusations of deliberate police inaction and racist double standards that the police finally charged a man for the assault, more than two months after the incident had been reported to them. Interestingly, the ABC reports that this 21-year-old man, formerly of Bermagui, now resides in Holsworthy in Sydney's south. Holsworthy, as many may know, is the location of a large army base.

Police racism in Australia is, of course, nothing new. Indeed, it far too often has deadly consequences. A group of concerned local residents were right in suggesting in a letter sent to the NSW Premier that "the tardiness exhibited by police in pursuing this investigation would have not occurred if a white family had been bashed," that a separate form of *justice* exists for the Aboriginal community. No wonder, as it is a form of justice that has seen hundreds of Aboriginal people killed in custody in the last three decades. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody that concluded in the early 1990s succeeded in whitewashing the deaths as all being "suicides."

Disgustingly, the local Narooma police have characterized the brutal New Years attack upon the Campbells, their son and nephew as "what essentially was a

brawl with up to 15 people involved." (<http://narooma.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/narooma-police-news-bermagui-assault-charge/1462309.aspx>) In other words, they are happy to *blame the victims* especially if they and their friends or bystanders had bravely attempted to defend themselves.

Such a *blame the victim* mentality on the part of the racist Australian authorities and society-at-large is, of course, now endemic and is part and parcel of, to take just one obvious and stark example, the continuing so-called Intervention into the Northern Territories Aboriginal communities. But it also echoes the local police actions in the events that had led up to this New Years morning attack on the Campbells.

In October 2006, as a barrister involved in the case later related, three cars filled with white youths drove to the houses of two Aboriginal families (including that of the Campbells) and shouted racist slogans. "Armed with weapons, they attacked the houses, where children were sleeping inside and in a tent on the lawn... The men in the house awoke and fought back, while a female elder rang the police." (*The Age*, 11 March 2008) Once the police had arrived they broke up the fight but, rather astoundingly but really not that surprisingly, allowed the white attackers to leave and later in the day charged the five Aboriginal people who had gone to the police station to relate the events of that night. These brave men and women were subsequently convicted, ostensibly for defending themselves and their families against three car loads of racist thugs who had set upon them in the middle of the night *in their very own homes* armed with "weapons such as golf clubs, bars and sticks" (<http://bega.yourguide.com.au/news/local/news/general/bermagui-brawl/313334.aspx>)

The convictions against them were ultimately quashed under appeal to the Supreme Court in Sydney in December 2008, just a fortnight before the latest attack on the Campbells, on the basis of the court determining that the police had deliberately flouted proper procedure when interviewing people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent. It was in retribution for this court decision that the two white thugs then set upon Muriel and Gary Campbell on New Years morning leaving Gary Campbell to face "surgery due to the kicking that he endured after being knocked to the ground." (*The Triangle*, February 2009.). As Muriel wrote in a statutory declaration, one of them shouted: "You might have won in Sydney but you are not going to win here tonight, you black c___s."

The quashing of the convictions against the five Aboriginal people who defended their families against a vicious and racist attack was indeed a victory. But those who are standing up to injustice need the working class to mobilize in solidarity with them in order to finally triumph. It's when the working class of all colours mobilizes to defend its Aboriginal sisters and brothers that a light at end of the dark tunnel of racism and discrimination will be seen: when our unions are prepared to use their industrial muscle and

take industrial action to protest against particular acts, such as have been recounted here, of racial discrimination by the police and other state forces.

Cronulla & Auburn: a study in contrasts



A young man of “Middle-Eastern appearance” is attacked by an angry mob on a train in Cronulla Station during the Cronulla riots of December 11, 2005. It had been all too clear for a week before this infamous day that a major public disturbance, to say the least, was in the offing. All week Alan Jones along with other radio talkback hosts fanned the flames of racism as a flurry of incendiary SMS text messages flooded the mobile phone network with calls-to-arms such as “Come to Cronulla this weekend to take revenge. This Sunday every Aussie in the Shire get down to North Cronulla to support L_b and w_g bashing day.” (The Sydney Morning Herald, 7 Dec 2006) Despite all this, police preparations for the much publicised event were paltry. As 5000 racists, egged on by at least three well-known white supremacist groups, began to gather at Cronulla Beach, the local police unbelievably claimed that they were sufficiently prepared to deal with any anticipated violence. Even as events at the Sydney beachside suburb turned very, very ugly and the huge, racist, drunken mob ran riot and searched out and attacked any dark-skinned people it could lay its hands on, police numbers remained conspicuously light. Predictably enough there were relatively few ensuing arrests of the violent white racists and those that were arrested were given very light sentences. The victims of the racist violence including one young man with a mixed Lebanese and Aboriginal heritage were, indeed, extremely lucky to get away with their lives as even ambulance officers arriving at the scene to assist the injured were themselves subsequently attacked by the angry, out-of-control racist mob.

The deliberately light police response during the Cronulla riot is in sharp contrast to the massive police mobilisation just over three months later when a small group of anti-racist activists gathered at Railway Park, Auburn in Sydney’s west on 26 March, 2006. The anti-racist protestors had come to condemn the Cronulla riot and called for a mass campaign to reopen Cronulla Beach to dark-skinned people who, since the riot, had been effectively shut out from accessing it. But they were met by a huge, threatening array of police officers. Despite this obvious attempt to intimidate anyone who might have considered attending the rally, they were unable to stop its core participants, numbering at most two dozen, from carrying on their demonstration surrounded by a ring of at least one hundred police including the heavily armed riot squad and a police dog unit.